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NIGHTLEAD GOVERNMENT

BY CHRISTOPHER MATTHEWS

ROME, OCT 14, REUTER--CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT STRONGMAN AMINTORE FANFANI TODAY BOWED TO INTENSE POLITICAL PRESSURE AND RELUCTANTLY ACCEPTED A MANDATE FROM PRESIDENT GIOVANNI LEONE TO TRY TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT.

MR. FANFANI, WHO HAS HEADED FOUR PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATIONS, AGREED TO TRY TO PULL ITALY OUT OF POSSIBLY ONE ITS WORST POLITICAL CRISIS.

HE DID SO MUCH AGAINST HIS OWN WISHES, SINCE HE SUSPECTS THAT POLITICAL ENEMIES ARE TRYING TO PUT HIM INTO THE HOT SEAT IN ORDER TO GET RID OF HIM, INFORMED SOURCES SAID.

THE OUTCOME OF HIS MISSION AS PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE IS VERY MUCH IN DOUBT, THE SOURCES SAID. NOTHING HAS BASICALLY CHANGED TO ALTER THE TERMS OF THE QUARREL THAT BROUGHT DOWN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT OF PREMIER MARIANO RUMOR ON OCTOBER 3.

BUT AS THE POWERFUL LEADER OF THE NATION'S DOMINANT POLITICAL PARTY, THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, THE 66-YEAR-OLD MR. FANFANI IS SEEN BY POLITICIANS AS THE MAN MOST QUALIFIED TO RESOLVE THE PRESENT CRISIS, RENDERED MORE COMPLEX BY A BACKGROUND OF INDUSTRIAL AND SOCIAL UNREST.

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MR. FANFANI IS STARTING OFF HIS MISSION WITH TWO DAYS OF PRELIMINARY CONSULTATIONS WITH ITALY'S MAIN POLITICAL LEADERS. A MEETING OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT LEADERSHIP WILL FOLLOW ON WEDNESDAY, AFTER WHICH MR. FANFANI WILL BEGIN IN EARNEST HIS EFFORTS TO FIND A COMMON PLATFORM FOR A COALITION GOVERNMENT.

HE WAS NON-COMMITAL WHEN ASKED HOW LONG HE THOUGHT HIS TALKS WERE LIKELY TO LAST. MR. FANFANI, WHO HAS BEEN PRIME MINISTER FOUR TIMES SINCE 1954, HAS ALSO HELD FOUR UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES AS PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE.

THE MAIN STUMBLING BLOCK IN HIS MISSION IS THE NEED TO RECONCILE THE VIEWS OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND THEIR POTENTIAL COALITION PARTNERS, THE SOCIALISTS AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, ON ECONOMIC POLICY AND RELATIONS WITH THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY.

THE SOCIALISTS HAVE BEEN INSISTING ON A RADICAL POLICY SWITCH TO EVEN OUT WHAT THEY CALL THE INJUSTICE OF THE PRESENT PACKAGE OF FISCAL MEASURES DESIGNED TO COMBAT INFLATION AND RESTORE THE COUNTRY'S BALANCE OF PAYMENTS POSITION.

THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS HAVE ACCUSED THE SOCIALISTS OF SABOTAGING THE GOVERNMENT AND OF MANEUVERING TO GET THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY INTO THE CABINET. SOCIAL DEMOCRAT LEADER MARIO TANASSI HAS REPEATEDLY CALLED FOR EARLY ELECTIONS.

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IF MR. FANFANI FAILS TO FIND A COMPROMISE FORMULA RECONCILING THE POTENTIAL COALITION PARTNERS, HIS ALTERNATIVES WILL BE A CENTER-RIGHT GOVERNMENT EXCLUDING THE SOCIALISTS BUT INCLUDING THE REPUBLICANS AND POSSIBLY THE LIBERALS, OR A MINORITY CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT CABINET DESIGNED TO SEE THE COUNTRY THROUGH TO EARLY GENERAL ELECTIONS IN THE SPRING.

THE SENATOR REFUSED AN OFFER OF THE PREMIERSHIP LAST JUNE DURING A PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT CRISIS. BUT THIS TIME, HE IS BEING ALLOWED TO RETAIN HIS KEY POST AS CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PARTY SECRETARY.

WHETHER THIS CAN BE MUCH COMFORT IS OF SOME DOUBT. WHEN MR. FANFANI LAST COMBINED THE JOBS OF PARTY SECRETARY AND PRIME MINISTER IN 1958, HIS OWN PARTY TURNED ON HIM AND EJECTED HIM OUT OF OFFICE, REALIZING THAT TOO MUCH POWER HAD BEEN CONCENTRATED IN HIS HANDS.

ALTHOUGH JUDGED THE MOST DYNAMIC OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS LEADERS, MR. FANFANI'S LATEST STINT AS PARTY SECRETARY HAS BEEN MARRED BY SOME BITTER POLITICAL FAILURES SUCH AS LAST DAY'S REFERENDUM ON DIVORCE AND THE SARDINIAN REGIONAL ELECTIONS THAT FOLLOWED.

ONLY SIX MONTHS AGO THE MAIN QUESTION IN POLITICAL CIRCLES WAS HOW LONG MR. FANFANI WOULD BE ALLOWED TO STAY IN HIS JOBS.

REITER 142 No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/05/02 : LOC-HAK-352-5-733-2